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PROGRAMMES AND POLICIES OF THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR NATURAL DISASTER REDUCTION

REGIONAL REPORTS

Reports of regional interest

The session on reports of regional interest has been organized by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Regional Office of the World Health Organization (WHO).

Introductory Statement by Dr. Claude de Ville de Goyet, Representative of the Pan American Health Organization, Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization

The PAHO Regional Office is pleased and honoured to cooperate in the organization of this important session on regional reports.

As an intergovernmental agency since 1902, in a region prone to earthquakes, cyclones, floods, volcanic eruptions and other natural hazards, we are acutely aware of the heavy social and economic impact of disasters on our member States, especially the developing countries.

Social versus economic impact of disasters

The activities for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction and the international community have given significant attention to the economic losses resulting from disasters. Indeed, these are staggering in terms of development. Poor countries, however, usually pay a much heavier toll in human lives than their developed counterparts. Furthermore, as a

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health agency, PAHO is particularly concerned with the social impact on the least privileged groups. Perhaps it is opportune to remember the definition of health adopted by the World Conference in Alma Ata in 1978, which stated that the complete state of physical and mental well being and not merely the absence of disease.

Beyond any doubt, a satisfactory state of health, as defined above, cannot exist without reasonable safety from disasters. This is why PAHO/WHO is committed to the multisectorial promotion of natural disaster reduction as a health priority. As part of the inter-American system and the United Nations, it recognizes that disaster reduction is primarily the responsibility of each sovereign nation.

National, regional and global approaches

For the purpose of disaster reduction, one should adopt a pragmatic non-political definition of region, based on a shared vulnerability to common natural risks.

Vulnerability to natural hazards does not respect human borders or United Nations definitions of regions. It is something shared among neighbouring countries. In the case of disasters, a tremendous solidarity unifies the countries of the Caribbean and Latin America, which often set aside their political differences and national interests. Vulnerability and response are regional.

So should prevention and preparedness activities be. Much more, however, remains to be done in the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction. If certain tasks such as standardization of norms and guidelines are better achieved at a global level, many disaster reduction functions, not practical or affordable for one single country, are much better carried out on a regional basis. We believe that one of the main contributions of the present session is to identify clearly those actions that are better implemented at the regional level, and to ensure that this level of action, which is closer to the realities of the countries, is given appropriate visibility in the Yokohama Conference.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness have provided ample opportunities for cooperative projects between neighbouring countries, and cross-border networking among experts and officials. This has opened the door to new dialogue and joint ventures among countries of the region, as you will hear from some of the speakers. Jointly with other regional or subregional institutions, PAHO is pleased to have contributed to making this possible. With the cooperation of the regional officer for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction in Costa Rica, we have attempted to report on the achievements of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean and present our view of future perspectives for action in a publication entitled A World Safe from Natural Disasters: The Journey of Latin America and the Caribbean. In that document, we retrace the 20-year process in which the region has matured from providing an improvised response to disasters towards

safety for sustainable development. This long and as yet uncompleted journey has been made possible by the willingness of the countries to share experiences, cooperate and transcend their political borders to adjust those dictated by nature.

Host country

Presenter: Vice-Minister Ichiro Ichikawa

Japanese collaborative projects in Asian countries

Japan is located in an area subject to typhoons and also in the Pacific mobile zone where seismic and volcanic activities occur constantly and has been heavily damaged by natural disasters. Japan is not, however, the only country undergoing such an experience: many other countries in the Asian region are similarly affected, for example, the Philippines which is also located in an area subject to typhoons, and Indonesia which is also in the Pacific mobile zone.

Japan has steadily reduced damages from natural disasters by carrying out research and development on disaster prevention and implementing various disaster countermeasures, and has simultaneously been positively promoting to other Asian countries international cooperation in the field of disaster reduction through its technology and experience.

In this presentation, Japan's international cooperation for natural disaster reduction in the Asian region will be briefly described and some projects introduced. Japan's governmental sector performs the following international cooperative activities: (a) technical cooperation, including the acceptance of trainees; (b) grant aid; (c) direct Government loans; and (d) aid through multilateral organizations.

The budgetary appropriation for international cooperation for disaster reduction in the Asian region is approximately ¥ 81 billion in the 1992 fiscal year, or about 60 per cent of the total contribution to worldwide disaster reduction cooperation (¥ 137 billion). Disaster prevention projects carried out by means of Japanese loans in the Asian region are the Bili-Bili multi-purpose dam project in Indonesia, the Wuguiangxi dam project in China, for example.

Some projects which have been conducted to prevent common disasters in cooperation with developing countries will be presented, examples of which are as follows:

(a) International joint research on natural disasters;

(b) Research on the improvement of disaster prevention systems in developing countries;

(c) Third country training concerning disaster prevention and mitigation;

(d) Flood and erosion control technology centre;

(e) Exchange of information on natural disasters, such as meteorological data;

(f) Research on remote sensing and disaster monitoring by satellites;

(g) Natural hazards map.

It is extremely important to gather each country's resources for reducing damages from natural disasters. Japan intends to make further efforts in international cooperation for disaster reduction in the Asian region as a member State of that region.

Panel on Africa

Summary

After brief introductory remarks, the session will continue with oral presentations, each of five minutes duration, on the four major natural disaster phenomena afflicting Africa: drought and related desertification, pest infestation, hydrometeorlogical and geophysical disasters. Each presentation is expected to be complemented by a written summary which would be distributed, preferably prior to the session.

Each presentation is required, first, to provide a very brief overview of regional disaster reduction activities, highlighting specific practical accomplishments and identifying the major obstacles encountered, including their underlying causes. Secondly, based on the lessons drawn, presenters will offer an outline of revised short-term and medium-term strategies and action programmes for mitigating the disaster phenomenon within their purview.

A major theme of the African regional report is that natural disaster reduction forms an integral part of the simultaneous quest for sustainable development and the satisfaction of vital needs of Africans: food, water, shelter, energy, health and remunerative activity. For instance, drought management is the quest for food security and ingenious water harvesting for domestic and industrial use. New techniques in insect sciences should minimize the devastation of food crops caused by locusts and grasshoppers, enhance food security and increase precipitation, thereby maintaining vegetation cover in semi-arid zones. Advances in meteorology can strengthen early warning and preparedness capacities against tropical storms and floods. Alternative energy sources could improve the prospects of adequate forest cover by the avoidance of premature tree felling for shelter and domestic fuel. Advances in, and interaction between physical, biological, social and engineering sciences should improve the survival chances of Africans against the impact of inevitable natural disaster phenomena.

Particular attention will, therefore, be paid, inter alia, to the plans of each specialist field for strengthening the network of electronic information exchange at the national, subregional and regional levels, domestic resource mobilization and the dissemination of new techniques to the vulnerable local communities in Africa.

Twenty-five minutes will be devoted to interventions from other participants. Concrete suggestions will be invited on some of the above issues. There will also be interest in discerning how research and development endeavours can reduce Africa's vulnerability to natural disasters, notably through active community participation and the incorporation of its results into the strategies and programmes for implementing sustainable development at the local, national, subregional and regional levels. During the final 15 minutes, panellists and the moderator will summarize the discussions and make concluding observations.

Panel on Europe

Activities of CIS countries in the IDNDR framework

Presenter: Mr. Sergei Shoigu

The report outlines the geographical characteristics of the Euro-Asian region, occupied by the CIS countries, with particular reference to the natural disasters that most often occur in the area.

It describes national systems of disaster management of the CIS countries, including goals and targets of the systems, their governing bodies, staff and facilities, and how disaster management is integrated into their national and general security systems. It explains national disaster management procedures and their relation to the goals and targets of the IDNDR.

National committees have been established to coordinate activities in the IDNDR framework, with an appropriate structure, mandate, authority and interrelationships with scientific, commercial, public and other institutions. Legislation, rules and procedures have been introduced and enacted in relation to the activities prescribed in the IDNDR framework.

The activities of CIS members in the IDNDR framework include the implementation of national plans and programmes for IDNDR, building upon practical results in disaster management achieved in prior years. Overall characteristics of the national projects related to IDNDR are described, including projects under way, results, obstacles and shortcomings.

Regional collaboration of CIS members in the IDNDR framework is guided by the Interstate Council for emergencies of natural and technological origin. An outline is given of this Council's regional activities in the IDNDR framework, along with problems encountered and assistance required. The CIS members are ready to assist other countries as part of their cooperation in the IDNDR framework.

Finally, proposals are made for the main activities to achieve the IDNDR targets in the second half of the Decade. At their fifth meeting, held at Moscow on 1 and 2 October, the Ministers for the EUR-OPA Major Risks Agreement of the Council of Europe adopted the Moscow Charter recognizing the Agreement as a platform for cooperation on natural and technological hazards between eastern Europe, the southern Mediterranean and western Europe.

The Agreement is an example of harmonious East/West and North/South cooperation in preventing and protecting against natural hazards.

The presentation will begin with a description by Mr. Jean-Pierre Massue, Executive Secretary, of the Agreement's contribution to natural hazard prevention in the Mediterranean basin:

(a) Training in hazard sciences (through the European network of specialized centres under the Agreement: Madrid, Monaco, Malta, Strasbourg, Ankara, Ravello and Athens, and the European programme for training in hazard sciences, FORM-OSE);

(b) Comparative analysis of hazard management legislation and research by European centres in seismology and marine pollution.

Professor A. Hebeish, President of the Egyptian Academy of Sciences, will report on a survey of the current availability of training in hazard sciences in the Mediterranean basin.

Professor F. Rizzi, Director-General of the University of the Mediterranean (UNIMED), will report on the preparations for the pilot project for the implementation of hazard science training modules in cooperation between Mediterranean universities.

Ambassador S. Canavesio will describe Italy's contribution to natural hazard prevention and protection in the Mediterranean from the viewpoints of seismicity, desertification and marine pollution.

South Pacific

Presenter: The Honourable Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi

The presentation is on the overall situation relating to natural disaster reduction in the South Pacific. The region is made up of 22 island countries - 13 independent nations and 9 territories - spread over 30 million square kilometres of the Pacific Ocean but with a combined land area of only 550,000 square kilometres. The larger islands are of volcanic origin, but the vast majority of the thousands of islands in the region are small, low-lying coral atolls which rise no more than four metres above sea-level at the highest point. Several countries are made up entirely of atoll islands.

Many different types of natural disasters affect the South Pacific island countries, with tropical cyclones the most frequent and the most damaging. Should changes in the global climate result in a rise in the sea level as presently predicted, the impact in the South Pacific would be catastrophic.

The presentation describes developments in disaster management in the region up to now, identifies areas on which more attention should be focused and puts forward concrete suggestions on ways to improve disaster management in general and promote IDNDR activities, in particular in the next five years, through regional cooperation and coordination.

The principal issue in the South Pacific is the reduction of the impact of frequent and severe natural disasters on the lives and the livelihood of highly vulnerable island communities. Such is the fragile nature of the islands' overall environment that the impact of natural disasters can seriously disrupt, even reverse development processes, and put beyond reach the goal of sustainable development.

The suggested strategy for natural disaster reduction in the South Pacific follows the approach recommended under IDNDR of incorporating, as an integral part of development plans to achieve sustainable development, the key elements of hazard and risk assessment, mitigation measures aimed at long-term preparedness and prevention, and ready access to reliable disaster warning systems. The success of such strategy depends on the recognition and acceptance by the political and community leaders of the importance of disaster management in the overall development of their countries. On the other hand, the effective formulation and implementation of disaster management measures would depend on the availability of trained personnel, an informed and responsive public, and efficient organization.

The Decade has had minimal impact in the South Pacific. There are, however, several disaster management programmes and projects under way in the region but these are uncoordinated and their effectiveness uncertain. The Decade has presented the opportunity and the impetus to coordinate disaster management activities in the region, a step which should result in maximum cost-benefit and improved disaster management processes, which should in turn lead to the achievement of the IDNDR targets by the year 2000. Regional cooperation in this area has already started with the successful coordination of the preparation of national and regional reports for the World Conference by the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), a regional organization in which all the South Pacific island countries are represented, and whose governing council has full policy and decision-making powers on behalf of its members.

The South Pacific region would like to see from the World Conference a firm commitment by the world community to natural disaster reduction, demonstrated by the establishment of a secure funding arrangement to assist IDNDR-related activities, particularly in the developing countries, and the establishment also of a simple and workable mechanism through which scientific and technical

knowledge and expertise on disaster management are made readily available for use in developing countries.

Additionally, the region would like the World Conference to recognize the special situation of developing island countries: this point is underlined by the request to appoint a representative from the South Pacific on the Scientific and Technical Committee for the Decade.

Cooperation between the United States of America and Mexico in natural disaster reduction

Presenters: Mr. Raul García Leal, Mexico, and Mr. James Lee Witt, United States of America

The United States of America and Mexico share many of the same hazards, and both have large populations at risk. The two countries have both experienced deadly earthquakes in recent years, even sharing the same fault system, the San Andreas. Tsunamis, some originating as far away as Hawaii, have hit Mexico and the United States of America. Two volcanoes, Mount Saint Helens and El Chichón, erupted in 1980 and 1982, respectively, with devastating impact. In 1988, Hurricane "Gilbert" hit Mexico and then hooked through the United States of America. Droughts are currently affecting portions of both countries.

The scientific understanding, technical know-how, and planning and response capability of both countries are substantial and can be utilized for mutual benefit. Mexico and the United States of America are sharing information, expertise, and cooperating on a variety of fronts in the effort to reduce vulnerability to natural hazards. Following are a few highlights of these joint efforts; while they are certainly fruitful efforts, much more can be done:

(a) Scientific and engineering exchanges: Joint research projects are carried out between academic experts from both countries to advance the knowledge base for managing shared hazards;

(b) City-to-city collaboration: Cities in both countries (e.g. Mexico City and Los Angeles) have ongoing exchanges of information and city personnel for disaster mitigation, response and recovery planning;

(c) Professional partnerships: As part of the United States of America-Latin American Partnership, local earthquake professional from the public and private sectors in both countries have met to exchange information, expertise, and experience;

(d) United States of America-Mexico Consultative Agreement on Natural Disasters: An inter-institutional cooperative agreement between the emergency management/civil defence agencies is in place to facilitate the management of natural disasters along the countries' shared border region. Activities in risk assessment, mitigation and response planning have been carried out.

Panel on Asia

Presenter: Ms. Jiang Li

Combined use of national technology and management capacity in disaster reduction

This report outlines the serious damage done by natural disasters in China and the history of efforts by the Chinese people to combat them; it describes the composition, terms of reference and activities of the Chinese National Committee for IDNDR; it lays emphasis on the combined use of national technology and management capacity for disaster reduction, a matter of importance in disaster reduction in the region of Asia and the Pacific.

An important feature of Chinese disaster reduction is that it draws on natural disaster monitoring and early warning systems put in place by government departments of hydrology, meteorology, oceanography, seismology, agriculture, forestry, geology and so forth from the centre down to local level to construct a first line of defence against disasters around a core of advanced technology.

The technological capabilities most used by China in disaster reduction are dams and flood control, drought control, earthquake precaution and control, geological disaster prevention, forest shelter-belt systems and sand-breaks, forest fire prevention and control and biological disaster prevention and control projects; they form the core of disaster reduction efforts.

Satellites, aircraft, remote sensing, communications and computers, to take but some examples, are among the advanced technologies extensively used in disaster reduction in China, and a vast quantity of research findings are put to positive use, thereby reinforcing and increasing China's technological and managerial capabilities in disaster reduction.

While attaching importance to the heightening of technological disaster-reduction capacity, the Chinese Government has also reinforced its overall managerial capacity: the Central Government and the governments of disaster-prone areas have set up combined disaster-reduction machinery and strengthened disaster-reduction management, laying down disaster-reduction programmes and investigating disaster-reduction strategies and countermeasures, following the guiding principle that prevention saves lives and should go hand-in-hand with relief.

Taking the example of China's efforts to combat major natural disasters in recent years, the report vividly depicts the combined use of national technology and management capacity in disaster reduction to mitigate the destructiveness of natural disasters: this is a common requirement in the Asia and Pacific region. An increase in the use of such capacity would be an outstanding contribution to the goals of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction.